

CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (currently amended) A load bearing apparatus for facilitating manual transport of a load,
said apparatus comprising:

a central rib to distribute a weight corresponding to said load over the back of a
user;

a stabilizing arm coupled to said central rib to stabilize said load with respect to
said user; ~~and~~

an opposing arm coupled to said supporting rib, wherein said stabilizing arm and
said opposing arm further comprise specific contours comprising a dorsal
segment and an anterior segment, and wherein said opposing arm

comprises a lateral extension that extends from said anterior segment; and
attachment means for attaching said load to said apparatus, said attachment means
being coupled to at least one of:

said central rib;

said dorsal segment of said stabilizing arm; and

said dorsal segment of said opposing arm.

2. (canceled)

3. (original) The load bearing apparatus of claim 1, wherein said central rib is substantially rigid.
4. (previously presented) The load bearing apparatus of claim 1, wherein said opposing arm substantially counterbalances said stabilizing arm such that said weight corresponding to said load is substantially evenly distributed over said central rib.
5. (previously presented) The load bearing apparatus of claim 1, wherein said stabilizing arm is coupled to one end of said central rib, and wherein said opposing arm is coupled to an opposite end of said central rib.
6. (previously presented) The load bearing apparatus of claim 1, wherein said stabilizing arm and said opposing arm are substantially rigid.
7. (previously presented) The load bearing apparatus of claim 1, further comprising at least one cushioning support coupled to an underside surface of said stabilizing arm and said opposing arm.
8. (original) The load bearing apparatus of claim 7, wherein said at least one cushioning support is further coupled to an underside surface of said central rib.
9. (original) The load bearing apparatus of claim 1, wherein said stabilizing arm is adjustably coupled to said central rib.

10. (previously presented) The load bearing apparatus of claim 1, wherein said at least one opposing arm is adjustably coupled to said central rib.
11. (currently amended) The load bearing apparatus of claim 1, ~~further comprising attachment means coupled to at least one of said central rib, said stabilizing arm and said opposing arm to facilitate attaching said load to said load bearing apparatus, wherein said central rib, said stabilizing arm and said opposing arm are substantially rigid.~~
12. (previously presented) The load bearing apparatus of claim 11, wherein said attachment means is configured to receive a support strap assembly, wherein said support strap assembly may be disposed between each of said load bearing apparatus and said load.
13. (currently amended) A load bearing apparatus for facilitating manual transport of a load, said apparatus comprising:
- a central rib to distribute a weight corresponding to said load over a user;
 - a stabilizing arm coupled to said central rib to stabilize said load with respect to said user;
 - an opposing arm coupled to said supporting rib, wherein said stabilizing arm and said opposing arm further comprise specific contours comprising a dorsal segment and an anterior segment, and wherein said opposing arm comprises a lateral extension that extends from said anterior segment;

attachment means coupled to at least one of said central rib, said dorsal segment of said stabilizing arm and said dorsal segment of said opposing arm to facilitate attaching said load to said load bearing apparatus, and wherein said attachment means is configured to receive a support strap assembly, and wherein said support strap assembly may be disposed between each of said load bearing apparatus and said load; and

wherein said support strap assembly comprises at least one dorsal strap attached to said ~~central rib~~ attachment means and at least one anterior strap attached to at least one of said anterior segment of said stabilizing arm and said anterior segment of said opposing arm.

14. (currently amended) A load bearing apparatus for facilitating manual transport of a load, said apparatus comprising:

a central rib to distribute a weight corresponding to said load over a user;

a stabilizing arm coupled to said central rib to stabilize said load with respect to said user;

an opposing arm coupled to said supporting rib, wherein said stabilizing arm and said opposing arm further comprise specific contours comprising a dorsal segment and an anterior segment, and wherein said opposing arm comprises a lateral extension that extends from said anterior segment;

attachment means coupled to at least one of said central rib, said dorsal segment of said stabilizing arm and said dorsal segment of said opposing arm to

facilitate attaching said load to said load bearing apparatus, and wherein said attachment means is configured to receive a support strap assembly, and wherein said support strap assembly may be disposed between each of said load bearing apparatus and said load; and

wherein said at least one anterior strap is attached to said opposing arm and wherein said opposing arm has a length longer than a length corresponding to said stabilizing arm, such that said load may be distributed substantially diagonally over a surface area of said user.

15. (original) The load bearing apparatus of claim 1, wherein said load bearing apparatus comprises a unitary assembly.

16. (currently amended) The load bearing apparatus of claim 1, wherein said stabilizing arm and said opposing arm are adjustably coupled to said central rib.

17. (original) The load bearing apparatus of claim 1, wherein said central rib comprises a substantially planar surface that substantially conforms to an upper surface of said user's back.

18. (previously presented) The load bearing apparatus of claim 1, wherein said stabilizing arm and said opposing arm comprise a substantially planar surface that substantially conforms to at least one of said user's shoulders.

19. (currently amended) A system for distributing a load over a back of a user to facilitate manual transport of said load, said system comprising:

a load capable of being supported by said user; and

a unitary shoulder frame assembly coupled to said load, said shoulder frame assembly comprising:

a central rib for distributing a weight of said load over the back of said user;

a stabilizing arm extending from said central rib to stabilize said load with respect to said user; ~~and~~

an opposing arm extending from said central rib, wherein said stabilizing arm and said opposing arm further comprise specific contours comprising a dorsal segment and an anterior segment, and wherein said opposing arm comprises a lateral extension that extends from said anterior segment; and

attachment means for attaching said load to said shoulder frame assembly,

said attachment means being coupled to at least one of:

said central rib;

said dorsal segment of said stabilizing arm; and

said dorsal segment of said opposing arm.

20. (original) The system of claim 19, wherein said opposing arm substantially counterbalances said stabilizing arm such that said weight corresponding to said load is substantially evenly distributed over said central rib.

21. (original) The system of claim 19, wherein said unitary shoulder frame assembly is substantially rigid.

22-25 (canceled)

26. (original) The system of claim 19, said shoulder frame assembly further comprising a substantially planar surface substantially conforming to said user's shoulders and back.

27. (original) The system of claim 19, said shoulder frame assembly further comprising at least one cushioning support coupled to an underside surface thereof.

28. (currently amended) The system of claim 19, ~~wherein said shoulder frame assembly further comprising attachment means is coupled to at least one of said central rib, said stabilizing arm and said opposing arm to facilitate attaching said load to said shoulder frame assembly.~~

29. (currently amended) The shoulder frame assembly of ~~claim 28~~ claim 19, wherein said attachment means ~~comprise~~ comprises a support strap assembly.

30. (original) The shoulder frame assembly of claim 29, wherein said support strap assembly comprises at least one dorsal strap attached to said central rib and at least one anterior strap attached to at least one of said stabilizing arm and said opposing arm.

31. (currently amended) A system for distributing a load over a back of a user to facilitate manual transport of said load, said system comprising:

a load capable of being supported by said user; and

a unitary shoulder frame assembly coupled to said load, said shoulder frame assembly comprising:

a central rib for distributing a weight of said load over said user;

a stabilizing arm extending from said central rib to stabilize said load with respect to said user;

an opposing arm extending from said central rib, wherein said stabilizing arm and said opposing arm further comprise specific contours comprising a dorsal segment and an anterior segment, wherein said opposing arm comprises a lateral extension that extends from said anterior segment; and

wherein said shoulder frame assembly further ~~comprising~~ comprises attachment means coupled to at least one of said central rib, said dorsal segment of said stabilizing arm and said dorsal segment of said opposing arm to facilitate attaching said load to said shoulder frame assembly, and wherein said attachment means ~~comprise~~ comprises a support strap assembly, and

wherein said support strap assembly comprises at least one dorsal strap attached to at least one of said central rib, said dorsal segment of said stabilizing arm and said dorsal segment of said opposing arm and at least one anterior strap attached to at least one of said stabilizing arm and said opposing arm, and wherein said at least one anterior strap is attached to said anterior segment of said opposing arm and wherein said opposing arm has a length longer than a length corresponding to said stabilizing arm, such that said load may be distributed substantially diagonally over a surface area of said user.

32. (currently amended) A method for distributing a weight of a load over a user to facilitate manual transport of said load, said method comprising:

providing a substantially rigid shoulder frame assembly to substantially conform to said user's shoulders and back, wherein the substantially rigid shoulder frame includes two differently shaped shoulder support members, wherein said shoulder support members further comprise specific contours comprising a dorsal segment and an anterior segment, wherein one of said shoulder support members comprises a lateral extension that extends from said anterior segment;

attaching said substantially rigid shoulder frame assembly to said load using a means for attaching loads, said means being located on a dorsal portion of said substantially rigid shoulder frame assembly;

positioning said substantially rigid shoulder frame assembly over said shoulders
and said back of said user such that said weight of said load is
substantially evenly distributed over said user.

33. (original) The method of claim 32, wherein said attaching said substantially rigid shoulder frame assembly to said load further comprises coupling a support strap assembly to each of said substantially rigid shoulder frame assembly and said load.
34. (original) The method of claim 33, wherein said positioning said substantially rigid shoulder frame over said shoulders and said back of said user further comprises selectively adjusting said support strap assembly to customize a relationship between said substantially rigid shoulder frame assembly and said load according to said user's body type and individual preferences.